

THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST UPPER ELKSTONE



A Chapel at Elkstones was first mentioned in 1524 and early maps suggest that it probably stood where the present Church is. This Church was built “at a cost of £200 under the supervision of William Grindon of Stonfold Lower Elkstone”. It would appear to have been consecrated in early April, 1788, after the Chapel Wardens had presented their credentials to the Visitation (Bishop?) at Cheadle. The small simple classical design incorporates a balcony supported either side of the aisle on wooden pillars mounted on wooden bases. This area was used in many chapels for the village orchestra. The balcony is reached by climbing 14 steps. It is tiered with four pews that could accommodate around 40 people. The section at the rear is now used for storage purposes. It contains on the back wall a ten seater pew and in front of the Bell Rope facing the back wall not the Altar, a three seater pew (perhaps for noisy children!) The Chapel had a wooden belfry and a single bell but the belfry was replaced by a metal gantry for safety.

A feature is the simple yet distinctive style of windows giving a sense of space and light. The floor and the fabric are of stone, no doubt quarried locally from one of three quarries once worked in Upper Elkstone. The wide window ledges were originally used for rush lamps and later oil lamps to illuminate the Chapel during winter months. St. John's has a very interesting ceiling although along with the pews it has been painted over to make the interior brighter. The ceiling once comprised 40 7" wide boards each 18 feet in length, uncut with decorative moulding. During repairs to the Belfry around the 1970's a number of rotted ceiling boards were removed and replaced with standard tongue and grooved floorboard. In the centre of the ceiling is a circular "round hole" ventiduct. The repair alongside is covering a hole from whence the coal fired stove pipe went through the roof, later to be replaced by gas, then in 1962 electricity was installed. The Pulpit is two tiered reached by climbing seven steps. Above is a sounding board or canopy. The Altar is a simple wooden table structure. A new carpet was fitted and the Altar frontal and decorative drapes were made by Myrtle Alcock in the mid 2000s A number of Decalogues can be seen on the Walls :— (a) The Ten Commandments (b) Lord's Prayer (c) Creed together with the Royal Coat of Arms for His Majesty George II being the centre piece over the Altar. Notice the Choir Stalls seating ten next to the organ which is a Farfisa purchased in 1989. Above the Choir Stalls is a Roll of Service to commemorate men serving in the Great World War. The East Window was purchased by money raised by various village functions, the most popular being village dances held twice a month in either the village school or using the loft in Underhill Farm buildings. The window, a Morris and Co. design, was erected in memory of Charles Bellfield A.B.S. and Walter John Salt who gave their lives in the Great War 1914 – 1918. Although the window is in memory of the two killed, a third was killed. George Kirkham joined the (ANZACS) Australian and New Zealand Expeditionary Force and was killed in action in the Dardinelles. His brother William was wounded at Hill 60 with the Durham Light Infantry. However, both are commemorated on the Roll of Service. Opposite the Roll of Service is a Brass Plaque to George Sutton of Blackbrook with details of his bequest.

Alterations have taken place in the body of the chapel. Two pews have been removed at the back to make a Vestry. A pew has been removed in front of the Pulpit to give more space. All the pews had doors (many now removed) and there are still 22 name plaques in position at the back or entrance of the family pews. Only one is decipherable, the others having had too much paint covering them. Seating in the Nave accommodates about 75 people. Many times on special occasions over 100 people have worshipped in the Church. The Baptism Font is of simple elegance in keeping with the style of the interior. It is provided with a font cover to protect it when not in use. The Font cover was purchased and presented to the Church by the Bowden Family in memory of Mrs. Amy Bowden who died in 1970. We welcome visitors from all over the World and there are many interesting entries in our Visitors' Book. Some recent visitors have come from :— Canada, Australia, Scotland, U.S.A., Hong Kong, Wales and every corner of England. Elkstone Church Accounts Since 1915 to 1950 in only seven of those years has there been a deficit in the annual accounts. Substantial surpluses began to appear in the Second World War period. Up to 1950 the highest amount in surplus in any one year was £121 12s 7d. The present organ was purchased in 1988 at a cost of £495. The previous organ purchased in 1974 cost (with pedal board) £349.80p Repairs to the previous organ are recorded :- 1916 £3 12s 0d 1928 12s 6d 1935 £5 0s 0d Real value for money! In addition to the Vicar's annual expenses, payments were made on an annual basis for : The Organist £3 0s 0d (average) The Caretaker £1 15s 0d The Bell Ringer £1 0s 0d Repairs to the Church bell and rehousing in 1922 cost 13s 6d. and when the Bell Tower was rebuilt in 1976 the total cost was £305 0s 0d. From time to time the Church was painted :— 1918 (only part) cost £3 12 3 1933 £6 12 18 1963 £204 12 6 £14 0 0 1972 £225 0 0 1987 £165 60p The Church door key was purchased in 1916 for 1s. 9d. In 1921 a coal fired stove was purchased and installed at a cost of £8. 5s. Od. .1934 saw the purchase of a replacement stove for £8 10s. Od. and 1954 saw the last recorded purchase of coal at £1 10s. Od. no quantity being mentioned In 1957 an oil stove was purchased for £9 17s. 6d. and five gallons of oil cost 10s. Od.!! Continuing with the modernisation programme ~ electricity was installed in 1962 at a cost of £86 5s. Od. St. Johns lies in the Parish of Warslow & Elkstones, and we are a member of the Benefice of Staffordshire Moorlands. Services are usually held on the first and third Sunday of every month apart from special celebrations.

From the Elkstones Books, 1st and 2nd editions - precis by Jill, updated by Rob – August 2019. We hope that you have enjoyed visiting our little Church and you are welcome to a copy of this booklet. There is no charge but a donation to our funds to help keep it open would be very welcome and much appreciated....